



Midnight sun provides a picturesque setting for Horseman Island, North Norway.

ARCTIC EMPIRES . . .

point in the new conception of polar strategy.

Hardly is it surprising that the U.S.S.R. seeks to fortify this riven archipelago. A recent Moscow announcement said that Norway had agreed to the joint defence of Spitzbergen (which was forbidden by the 1920 Paris Treaty signed by twelve countries, and to which Russia adhered in 1925), adding that "negotiations with the other Powers on its future status are not completed." A subsequent Norwegian report said that fortification of the Russian mining concession at Barentsburg has begun.

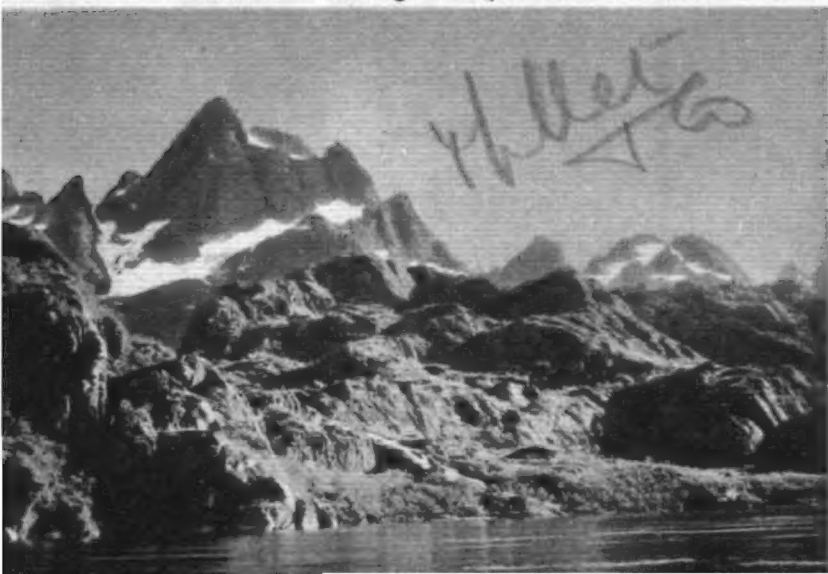
The 2,300 Russian miners there cut 500,000 tons of high-grade bunker-coal annually before the war. The loss of this coal was a serious matter to Murmansk and Archangel when the Germans occupied Spitzbergen; and the Russians cannot be criticised for trying to prevent a repetition of this episode in any future war.

What is the reason for the sudden military emphasis on the polar regions?

The answer is that the wings that made polar colonisation possible, also gave the Far North a military value; and Russian air, naval and military bases in the Far North are no more than the answer to the vast new military network now being created from Nome, on the Bering Straits opposite Siberia, right across the "Great Northlands" to Fort Churchill on the Hudson Bay, and beyond to Greenland and Iceland.

The Alaska Highway, built to link the airfields used to

The mountains overlooking "Trollfjord" near the Lofoten Islands.



fly lease-lend aircraft to Siberia during the war, has become a "possible dagger pointed at the backdoor to Moscow." Constant American manoeuvres in Alaska, the construction of new airfields along the Bering Straits and the extension of existing ones, and the practice-landing of military aircraft on "young ice"; these and many other developments must have a certain significance in Russian eyes. Likewise, no doubt, the Soviet saw a possible significance in the joint U.S.-Canadian Operation Muskox last year, in which aircraft, snow-vehicles and other equipment were tested in the Arctic; in the development of Fort Churchill into a military post, small as yet, but growing.

Trade or Defence?

The development of Fort Churchill typifies the way in which colonisation is followed by new strategical requirements. For decades Fort Churchill was a distant outpost of the Hudson's Bay Company, the home of fur trapper and trader. Aviation increased its commercial value, making it accessible even when winter ice locks its harbour, and to-day Churchill would prove important in the defence of the Canadian Arctic.

The Canadian gold-mining town, Yellowknife, has grown, in thirteen years, from two log cabins to a community of 3,000 people, and as it grows so it becomes a firmer link in the new Arctic strategy based on aircraft.

Did not the Russian chain of meteorological stations also begin with a purely commercial purpose? They were probably built with no other end in view than to maintain regular summer convoys through the North-East Passage. Likewise, at least some of the airfields in the same area were originally built for the aircraft that pilot the ice-breakers through the ice floes of the Passage. To-day they undoubtedly have a military significance.

In the same way the Canadian Arctic meteorological network, founded by the Hudson's Bay Company, plays an important part in sea communications and civil aviation, and would prove invaluable in warfare.

Lastly, these same meteorological stations and airfields are on the shortest route between Russia and North America, whether the objective is of a military nature or the air exchange of vodka for canned hamburgers. But for aviation the commercial development of the Arctic would still be only a dream of the modern pioneer. And the wings that made possible the colonisation of the Arctic by 1,500,000 people in twenty years has also given the tundra and the muskeg a military significance.